
Press Release

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Avoiding a Transportation Meltdown in Southern California Subject of SCAG General Assembly May 1-2

INDIAN WELLS – Years of neglect, a rapidly expanding population and an inability to pay for needed improvements is pushing California toward a transportation meltdown that threatens economic stability, the air we breathe and our quality of life, regional policy makers warn.

Fixing that requires regional solutions, and in the coming days, nearly 400 elected leaders from throughout Southern California will gather in Indian Wells to discuss the future of transportation, the connection between mobility and prosperity, and creative solutions to the funding and regulatory challenges that could leave our region in gridlock for decades to come.

The Southern California Association of Governments hosts its annual Regional Conference & General Assembly every spring, and this year's takes on special importance with a Congressional deadline looming over transportation reauthorization and the work that's begun on SCAG's 2016-2040 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy.

The conference, May 1-2 in Indian Wells, feature a number of breakout sessions on the transportation and quality-of-life challenges and needs facing our region. Among the highlights is a panel on the region's high poverty levels, and how educators, businesses and policy makers must work collaboratively to create employment opportunities. Last December, SCAG reported that 25 percent of children in the six-county region live in poverty.

"In fact, poverty in Southern California has risen significantly in the past two decades," said Greg Pettis, President of SCAG and a Cathedral City council member. "We need to identify the opportunities for collaboration, and make sure Southern California's workforce has the education and technological know-how to meet the region's future economy."

Transportation infrastructure can play a major role in creating economic opportunity. SCAG's 2012-2035 RTP/SCS identified more than \$524 billion in transportation-related investments, which would create – directly and indirectly – more than 500,000 jobs per year and yield a return of \$2.90 for every dollar spent.

Much of that benefit is in the form of congestion relief, increased labor mobility and efficient movement of goods. With the six-county region a projected population increase of 4 million people over the next 25 years – on top of the 18 million who currently live here – the need for investment has become an urgent one.

Recently, President Obama proposed a \$302 billion, four-year surface transportation reauthorization plan to replace the current Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), which expires on Oct. 1. Significantly for Southern California, the plan includes, for the first time, funding for a national freight program -- \$10 billion over the four years.

Goods movement and related industry account for one-third of all jobs and economic activity in the SCAG region.

“Ensuring the efficient, safe delivery of goods through our region is key to our being able to sustain our economy and continue to create jobs,” said Hasan Ikhata, Executive Director of SCAG. “Even a 5 or 10 percent loss in market share for our freight industry would be catastrophic.”

How to pay for these and other improvements is another daunting, and urgent, challenge. The Highway Trust Fund, which pays for highway improvements via the 18.4 federal gas tax, is projected to run out of money late summer to early fall – the result of more fuel-efficient cars and resistance to raising the tax rate since it was last raised in 1993. Proposed alternatives include switching to a funding formula based on vehicle miles traveled.

“These are not easy decisions, but doing nothing isn’t an option either,” said Ikhata. “We need to look at this as an investment that will pay dividends and preserve our quality of life.”

Also at the Regional Conference & General Assembly, Carl Morehouse, a Ventura council member, will be sworn in as SCAG President for the coming year. Gregory D. Winfree, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation’s Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA), will be the keynote speaker.

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About SCAG

SCAG is the nation’s largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities and more than 18 million residents. SCAG undertakes a variety of planning and policy initiatives to plan for a livable and sustainable Southern California now and in the future. For more information about SCAG’s regional efforts, please visit www.scag.ca.gov.